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## HOW THE MEDICAL CATEGORY OF ‘BROWN PHLEGM’ CAME TO TIBET?

ICTAM IX, AUGUST 6–12, 2017, KIEL

Henk Blezer, © October 2016, Leiden & Amsterdam Free University

This is a modest contribution to ongoing investigation of so-called ‘brown phlegm’ (disorders) in Tibet (Tib. *bad kan smug po*). The main hypothesis of this long-term research engagement is that the Tibetan medical category of ‘brown phlegm’, which looks to be a Tibetan innovation, may be of Graeco-Arab origin (‘black bile’). This thesis was first introduced at ICTAM VII,<sup>1</sup> as a tangential concern, and was published as such, with the promise to revisit it.<sup>2</sup>

The research logic was laid out at the ICAS 9 (esp. the Tibetan side of the equation),<sup>3</sup> while a preliminary survey of the Graeco-Arab side was discussed further at the IATS XIV.<sup>4</sup> The precise historical contact between these medical epistemes has remained elusive, so far. For the ICTAM IX, I propose to look into possible points of contact.

There are two main aspects to this endeavour.

1) WE NEED TO TAKE A CLOSER LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF IDEAS OF ‘BROWN PHLEGM’ IN TIBET. Discussion of ‘brown phlegm’ is already extant in early (and even the earliest) grand medical syntheses in Tibet and in some of the former’s precursors as well: e.g., in ‘The Moon King’ (*Zla ba’i rgyal po*), the ‘Jewel Rosary’ (*Nor bu’i phreng ba*), the ‘Sons’ Benefit’ (*Bu don ma*), and the ‘Small Tantra or Treatise’ (*rGyud chung*), and of course in the ‘Fourfold Collection’ (*Bum bzhi*) and the ‘Fourfold Tantra or Treatise’ (*rGyud bzhi*)—the descriptions in the former, earlier sources, mostly are very close to latter two.

Only in some of the later sources, which sit in the beginning of the second millennium, ‘brown phlegm’ is systematically set apart and explicitly discussed as a ‘combined disease’ (*dus pa’i nad*); most conspicuously in the ‘Fourfold’ treatises but also in the closely related ‘Jewel Rosary’. In other sources ‘brown phlegm’ is simply included in the ‘phlegm’ chapter, together with various other types.

2) POSSIBLE POINTS OF CONTACT. As a hypothesis I should like to examine Tibetan narratives on dissemination of Graeco-Arab medical lore that was ultimately attributed to Galen himself. The ‘*Bi ji*’, ‘*Bi ci*’ or ‘*Be ci*’ lineage starts from a figure called Tsan pa shi la ha (eighth c. CE). While most parse his name in a plausible Tibetan way, as Tsan pa – Shi la ha, Dan Martin<sup>5</sup> has proposed a more convincing caesura: Tsan – Pa shi la ha, i.e., Basilius or Bāsil of Tsan.

According to surviving narratives, Tsan pa shi la ha was a doctor of ‘Turkic’ descent (hailing from ‘Phrom’; see Martin 2011) who taught and eventually also settled down in Lhasa. His system is said to go back to the famous Galenos or Galen of Pergamum (130–200 CE).<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the most significant trace to date of this so-called *Bi ji* transmission of medicine, the *Bi ji po ti kha gser*, due to its presumably late redaction, does not take us back very far.

These two concerns will be the major prongs of my presentation for the ICTAM IX in Kiel.

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<sup>1</sup> Thimphu, Bhutan, September 2009.

<sup>2</sup> See *Revue d’Etudes Tibétaines* 23 (2012) ), pp.117–168, based on a paper presented at the ICTAM VII, in Thimphu, Bhutan 2009, and see now also an abbreviated or isolated version in *Tibetan and Himalayan Healing: an Anthology for Anthony Aris*, pp.43–64, Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Adelaide, Australia, July 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Bergen, Norway, June 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Martin, D.P. (2011), “Greek and Islamic medicines’ historical contact with Tibet”, in *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, edited by Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, pp. 117–143, Farnham: Ashgate, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> In some Tibetan sources there is even mention of someone (also) bearing the name Galenos (complete with a correct Tibetan transliteration of the Greek spelling), who presumably was in Tibet a little earlier, in the 7th c. CE, but Beckwith has exposed this as a myth.

## Drugs, Fluids, and Other Matters: Medical History through the Lens of Things (Natalie Köhle)

### How the Medical Category of 'Brown Phlegm' Came to Tibet?

This is a modest contribution to ongoing investigation of so-called 'brown phlegm' (disorders) in Tibet (Tib. *bad kan smug po*). The main hypothesis of this long-term research engagement is that the Tibetan medical category of 'brown phlegm', which looks to be a Tibetan innovation, may be of Graeco-Arab origin ('black bile'). This cultural contact thesis was introduced at the ICTAM VII, as a rather tangential concern, and was published as such, with the promise to revisit it.\*

The research logic was laid out at the ICAS 9 (esp. the Tibetan side of the equation), while a preliminary survey of the Graeco-Arab side was discussed further at the IATS XIV. The precise historical contact between these medical epistemes has had to remain elusive and speculative, however. For the ICTAM IX, I propose to look into a possible point of contact.

There are two main aspects to this endeavour:

1. We will take a closer look at the history of ideas of 'brown phlegm' in Tibet, particularly between earlier and later Tibetan sources.
2. We will examine a possible point of contact in space and time: the so-called '*Bi ji*', '*Bi ci*' or '*Be ci*' lineage and a figure called Tsan pa shi la ha (eighth c. CE), parsed as: Tsan – Pa shi la ha, i.e., Basilius or Bāsil of Tsan.\*\*

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\* See Blezer, H.W.A., *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 23 (2012) ), pp.117–168, based on a paper presented at the ICTAM VII, in Thimpu, Bhutan 2009, and see now also an abbreviated or isolated version in *Tibetan and Himalayan Healing: an Anthology for Anthony Aris*, pp.43–64, Kathmandu: Vajra Publications, 2015.

\*\* See Martin, D.P., "Greek and Islamic medicines' historical contact with Tibet", in *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, edited by Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, pp. 117–143, Farnham: Ashgate, 2011.

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